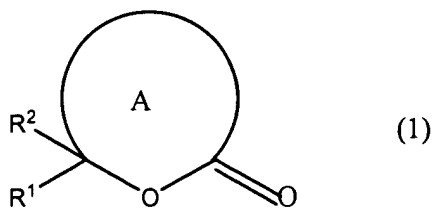


AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

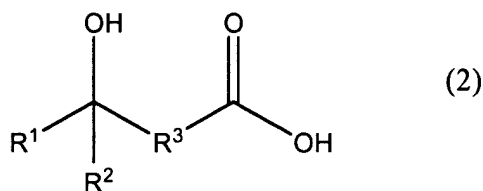
1. (Previously Amended) A method for producing a lactone comprising culturing *Candida sorbophila* in a medium containing at least one selected from a hydroxy fatty acid, a hydroxy fatty acid derivative, and a hydrolysate of a hydroxy fatty acid derivative, and recovering the produced lactone from the medium.
2. (Previously Amended) A method for producing a lactone comprising culturing *Candida sorbophila* in a medium containing at least one selected from a hydroxy fatty acid, a hydroxy fatty acid derivative, and a hydrolysate of a hydroxy fatty acid derivative, and lactonizing a lactone precursor hydroxy fatty acid produced in the medium.
3. (Previously Amended) The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the *Candida sorbophila* is at least one selected from *Candida sorbophila* strain ATCC 74362, *Candida sorbophila* strain ATCC 60130, *Candida sorbophila* strain IFO 1583, and *Candida sorbophila* strain FC 58 deposited under the accession number FERM BP-8388.
4. (Original) The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the lactone is represented by general formula (1):



wherein ring A represents a lactone ring; R^1 represents a hydrogen atom, a hydrocarbon group, a substituted hydrocarbon group, a heterocyclic group, or a substituted heterocyclic group; and R^2 represents a hydrogen atom, a hydrocarbon group, or a substituted hydrocarbon group; in which ring A and R^2 may be bonded to form a ring.

5. (Original) The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the lactone is an optically active lactone.

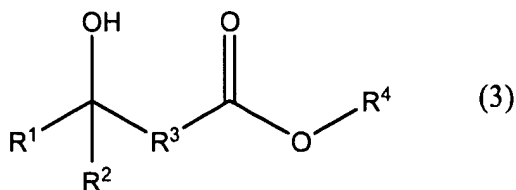
6. (Original) The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the hydroxy fatty acid is represented by general formula (2):



wherein R^1 represents a hydrogen atom, a hydrocarbon group, a substituted hydrocarbon group, a heterocyclic group, or a substituted heterocyclic group; R^2 represents a hydrogen atom, a hydrocarbon group, or a substituted hydrocarbon group; and R^3 represents an optionally substituted divalent hydrocarbon group having a 4 or more-carbon chain; in which R^2 and R^3 may be bonded to form a ring.

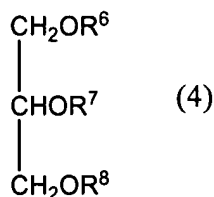
7. (Original) The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the hydroxy fatty acid derivative is an alkyl ester of hydroxy fatty acid or a glyceride of hydroxy fatty acid.

8. (Original) The method according to claim 7, wherein the alkyl ester of hydroxy fatty acid is represented by general formula (3):

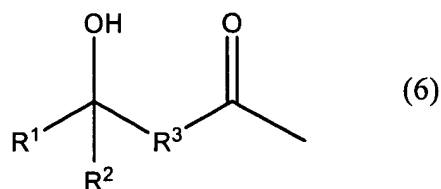


wherein R^1 represents a hydrogen atom, a hydrocarbon group, a substituted hydrocarbon group, a heterocyclic group, or a substituted heterocyclic group; R^2 represents a hydrogen atom, a hydrocarbon group, or a substituted hydrocarbon group; R^3 represents an optionally substituted divalent hydrocarbon group having a 4 or more-carbon chain; and R^4 represents an alkyl group; in which R^2 and R^3 may be bonded to form a ring.

9. (Original) The method according to claim 7, wherein the glyceride of hydroxy fatty acid is represented by general formula (4):



wherein R^6 to R^8 each independently represents a hydrogen atom or a group represented by general formula (6):



wherein R^1 represents a hydrogen atom, a hydrocarbon group, a substituted hydrocarbon group, a heterocyclic group, or a substituted heterocyclic group; R^2 represents a hydrogen atom, a

hydrocarbon group, or a substituted hydrocarbon group; R^3 represents an optionally substituted divalent hydrocarbon group having a 4 or more-carbon chain; and R^4 represents an alkyl group; in which R^2 and R^3 may be bonded to form a ring, provided that at least one of R^6 to R^8 is a group represented by the above general formula (6).

10. (Previously Amended) The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein *Candida sorbophila* is cultured in a medium containing at least one selected from castor oil, a castor oil hydrolysate, ricinoleic acid, 11-hydroxypalmitic acid, lesquerolic acid, 10-hydroxystearic acid, 10-hydroxypalmitic acid, and ethyl 11-hydroxypalmitate.

11. (Original) The method according to claim 2, wherein the lactone precursor hydroxy fatty acid is a hydroxy fatty acid of 4 or more carbon atoms having a hydroxy group at position 4 or 5 thereof.

12. (Previously Amended) The method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the lactone is any one selected from γ -decalactone, γ -valerolactone, γ -hexalactone, γ -heptalactone, γ -octalactone, γ -nonalactone, γ -undecalactone, γ -dodecalactone, γ -tridecalactone, γ -tetradecalactone, δ -decalactone, δ -hexalactone, δ -heptalactone, δ -octalactone, δ -nonalactone, δ -undecalactone, δ -dodecalactone, δ -tridecalactone, and δ -tetradecalactone.

13. (Withdrawn) A method for producing a lactone precursor hydroxy fatty acid comprising culturing *Candida sorbophila* in a medium containing at least one selected from a hydroxy fatty acid, a hydroxy fatty acid derivative, and a hydrolysate of a hydroxy fatty acid derivative.

14. (Previously Amended) A method for producing γ -decalactone comprising culturing *Candida sorbophila* in a medium containing at least one selected from castor oil, a castor oil hydrolysate, ricinoleic acid, and lesquerolic acid, and recovering the produced γ -decalactone from the medium.

15. (Previously Amended) A method for producing γ -decalactone comprising culturing *Candida sorbophila* in a medium containing at least one selected from castor oil, a castor oil hydrolysate, ricinoleic acid, and lesquerolic acid, and lactonizing γ -hydroxydecanoic acid produced in the medium.

16. (Original) The method according to claim 14 or 15, wherein γ -decalactone is an optically active γ -decalactone.

17. (Previously Amended) The method according to claim 14 or 15, wherein the at least one is castor oil and/or a castor oil hydrolysate.

18. (Original) A method for producing δ -decalactone comprising culturing *Candida sorbophila* in a medium containing 11-hydroxypalmitic acid and/or ethyl 11-hydroxypalmitate and recovering the produced δ -decalactone from the medium.

19. (Original) A method for producing δ -decalactone comprising culturing *Candida sorbophila* in a medium containing 11-hydroxypalmitic acid and/or ethyl 11-hydroxypalmitate and lactonizing δ -hydroxydecanoic acid produced in the medium.

20. (Original) The method according to claim 18 or 19, wherein δ -decalactone is an optically active δ -decalactone.

21. (Previously Amended) The method according to claim 14, 15, 18, or 19, wherein the *Candida sorbophila* is at least one selected from *Candida sorbophila* strain ATCC 74362, *Candida sorbophila* strain ATCC 60130, *Candida sorbophila* strain IFO 1583, and *Candida sorbophila* strain FC 58 deposited under the accession number FERM BP-8388.

22. (Cancelled)

23. (Withdrawn) An isolated *Candida sorbophila* strain FERM BP-8388.